Castlemaine Naturalist

August 2016

Vol. 41.7 #445

Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Regent Honeyeater - photo by Hugh Leach

Birds in Castlemaine – past and present

CFNC member Damian Kelly, our speaker at the July meeting, presented an entertaining talk on Hugh Leach, who is commemorated in Castlemaine by the Kalimna bird fountain built to honour his contributions to birding in our area. Damian and Chris Timewell have been investigating the story of Leach's bird observations and photography in St Arnaud and Castlemaine, trying to track down descendants of his six children and the whereabouts of his B&W photographs and negatives, plates or films. Damian illustrated his talk with a number of Leach's remarkable images of birds, and of the landscape around Castlemaine – so different from today.

H. A. C. Leach was a teacher, appointed as head teacher at St Arnaud in 1915 before he moved to Castlemaine, where he taught at the Barkers Creek school until moving again in 1929. Like many skilled naturalists of that era, he was a skilled shot, keeping a rifle under his desk at the school! Some of the audience were wondering whether the amazing close-up photographs were of birds he had shot and had stuffed, but no – he is reputed to have used his gun to frighten off large predatory birds that were threatening the eggs or young of small birds like his favourite robins. Leach was heavily involved in the Gould League of bird lovers, and was largely responsible for over 400 Castlemaine residents joining the League.

A plastic milk crate full of boxes of Leach's negatives and lantern slides was brought to Castlemaine by one of his grandsons, who has helped Damian and Chris in their quest. These precious records of the birds and the landscape of our region are being transferred to safe archival storage conditions, and are being digitized, although this will take time. The films were slow, requiring relatively long exposures – so how did Hugh Leach achieve photographs of a robin perching on his pipe, just inches from his

face? The secret was to hold a baby from the adults' nest in his hand, out of sight of the camera – attracting an agitated parent! He claimed that the parents settled down once he returned the baby to the nest.

Amongst the papers that Damian and Chris have been able to access is a school record book – used by Hugh Leach to write three chapters of a book about his birding experiences. Damian has prepared an "eBook" based on Leach's elegant copperplate manuscript, but is left wondering whether there are more chapters still to be found. Confusingly, the well known *An Australian Bird Book,* first published in 1911, is by another Leach – John Albert – and it seems that J. A. Leach visited Castlemaine at some time – did the two bird loving Leaches meet?

Finally, Damian commented on the changes in bird numbers and species since Hugh Leach's time in St Arnaud and Castlemaine, having recently visited St Arnaud where there are still good sightings of Leach's favourite robins. He is also keen to hear from any member who may have information about Hugh Leach.

- Peter Turner, with thanks to Damian Kelly for the photographs.

Dusky Woodswallow nest

A Hugh Leach photo.

GRAPTOLITES

George Broadway

As we all know, graptolites were colonial animals somewhat like the present day Coelenterates, i.e. Corals and Jellyfish. They formed small colonies of separate animals with a connecting cord of tissue. Many were planktonic and so today are found widespread in rocks all over. They flourished in the Ordovician period but tended to evolve in the direction of having fewer and fewer arms until they became extinct completely in the Silurian.

Because they evolved fairly rapidly throughout this period they have proved to be extremely useful in dating rocks, which was useful during the gold-rush period as rocks of similar ages could be identified. In the Castlemaine area for instance, rocks of the Ordovician period are subdivided according to the Graptolite fossils; so we have periods known as Castlemainian, Bendigonian, Yapeenian, Chewtonian, etc

Despite this however, I have not been very lucky in finding Graptolite fossils myself, despite looking hopefully at likely looking rocks wherever I find them.

On the other hand, I find I have come into possession of a student notebook which belonged to a senior student of Castlemaine High School who apparently took Geology as a subject, and was required to submit this "Science Note Book" as a record of his work. It is signed by the teacher, W. Harris, and the Headmaster W. Errey and records work done in the year 1914.

As part of his study, the student, John (Jack) Griffiths has recorded five excursions undertaken during the year. They were to the following locations:

1. Elphinstone tunnel
2. Nicholsons Gully
3. Guildford
4. Golden Point
5. Mitchells Falls

1.In the cutting leading to the tunnel at Elphinstone he describes finding anticlines with radial splitting with vertical cleavage in the rocks, and although the rocks tended to split across the graptolites he reports finding -

Didymograptus caduceus;
Loganograptus loganii;
Diplograptus spp

2. In Nicholsons Gully two fossils were found -

Didymograptus caduceus;
Phyllograptus typus

3. At Guildford in passing from Mein's House to the Golden Lead (*does anyone know about these ?)* blocks of blue slate were found. These contained graptolites such as:-

Loganograptus loganii;
Didymograptus caduceus

4. At Golden Point, two localities are mentioned. The first was about one mile from Chewton where they walked up a valley and found:-

Didymograptus (again)
Rhinopteriscaris maccoyii (I *have googled this to no avail. The internet was of no help)*
The second locality was described as being near the Golden Point Post Office. (*Where was this ?)* Here the same two fossils were found plus Diplograptus spp

5. Mitchells Falls

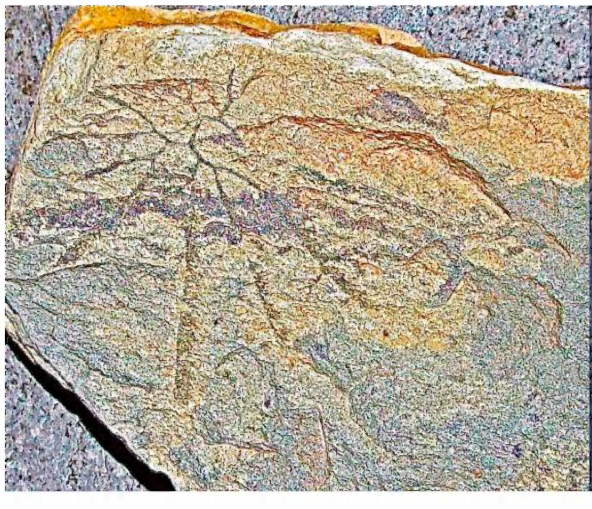
Below the falls where the bedrock is exposed, near some old Italian diggings (gold) the following fossils were found.
Tetragraptus fruticosus
Tetragraptus pendens
Rhinopteriscaris (again)

In addition to the fossils listed at the various localities, he has listed all the fossils seen, including some not previously listed. These include:-
Clonograptus spp;
Dichograptus octobrachiatus and bifidus;
Tetragraptus similus;
Goniograptus spp

I am assuming that the numbers of the localities correspond to the order in which the excursions are described.

So if a student of 100 years ago could go out into the field and find all these fossils he must have been a smarter fossil hunter than me, that's all I can say.

Below however, are two of mine. Actually it was Phee who found the Loganograptus



Loganograptus

Tetragraptus

Thanks to the contributors to this month's Castlemaine Naturalist.

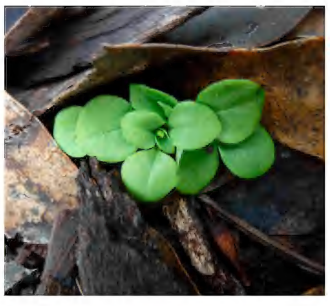
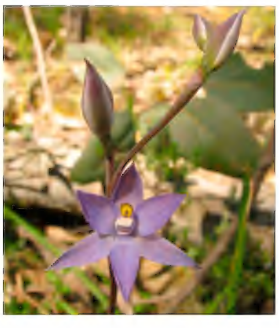
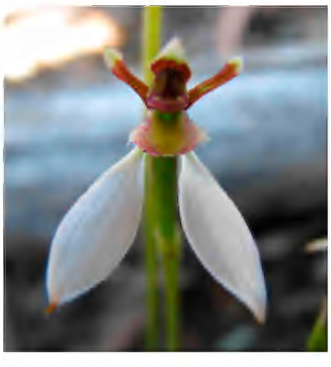
Did you know that copies of all except three Castlemaine Naturalists are now available on our website (up to December 2015)?

Please note that the deadline for articles for the September issue is August 26.

- ED

Answers to the Orchid leaf photos last month - Geraldine Harris

Photo 1 Scented Sun-orchid (*Thelymitra megcalyptra*)
Photo 2 Parsons Bands (*Eriochilus cucullatus*)
Photo 3 Wax-lip Orchid (*Glossodia major*)
Photo 4 Dwarf Greenhood (*Pterostylis nana*)

Orchid-leaf Search July 9, 2016

A numbers of members took up the challenge to go orchid-leaf hunting at the July field outing. The aim was to encourage members to start looking for and photographing orchid leaves early in the season, in a methodical manner, in order to contribute to a new "Orchid Leaves" section of Ern Perkin's Plant List.

Members made several stops along Youngmans track to search for orchid leaves and share ideas about how to recognise various species.

Lists of the 87 local species were handed out and a four point approach was discussed:

1 FIND & photograph potential leaves

2 FOCUS on specific plants you think worth watching and mark them in an unobtrusive and environmentally friendly manner (so that you can find them again but others will not notice) e.g., take a identifying photo of the site, mark with small stone formation, make notes etc.

3 FREQUENT your leaf sites regularly to record changes.

4 FINALE - photograph identifying flower. Edit your photos.

Hopefully at the end of the season we will have an interesting lot of photos to pass on to Ern.

Happy Orchid Hunting!

Geraldine

Bird and plant quiz

Last month's bird was the Yellow-tufted Honeyeater. A locally common species, it is very similar in appearance to the critically endangered Helmeted Honeyeater. which is now classed as one of three races (*cassidix*) of the Yellow tufted. Our version is *Lichenostomus melanops meltoni*, essentially the race favouring the inland side of the Divide from Rockhampton to the Victorian Box Ironbark forest.

See if you can recognise this month's bird photo (Nigel) and plant (Geraldine)

Our August speaker – Alan Reid

Alan Reid is a retired teacher, naturalist and environmental writer who began his nature event recording in 1954. He was co-founder of the Colac Field Naturalists Club whilst teaching at Colac from 1954 to 1959 and from 1959 to 1966 he taught Natural History at the Childrens' School Camp at Somers.

He taught Ecology and Field Studies at Burwood Teachers' College from 1967 to 1973, and was Education Officer for both the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Gould League between 1970 and 1985 where he produced many conservation and natural history publications.

From 1990 to 2000 he was President of the Gould League and a regular commentator on ABC radio.

In 1993 he established the Timelines Australia Project, which is still devoted to producing environmental event calendars and predictive materials for bio-regions around Australia.

Alan has been a qualified bird-bander for over 60 years and has been involved in developing and monitoring wildlife corridors on the family farm at Glenburn and on Flinders Island. In 1985 he was awarded the inaugural Victorian Environmental Award; in 1993 the Australian Natural History Medallion, in 1988 a Banksia Foundation Award, and in 2006 an OAM for service to Environmental Education.

Alan's talk is entitled "A Regional Model for Community Environmental Monitoring - Flinders Island 2003- 2016"

SEANA Autumn Camp 2017

Host clubs: Sale & District FNC and Latrobe Valley FNC

Friday 17 – Monday 20 March, 2017

Sale, just over 200km east of Melbourne, is the centre of an amazingly diverse region. It includes the Gippsland Lakes system with important wetland habitats, the Sale Common & State Game Refuge, the Ninety Mile Beach, rugged high country such as the Avon-Mt Hedrick Wilderness and numerous other reserves – for instance, Holey Plains State Park with its significant flora. We plan to include these and other attractions in the program, along with the option of a Lakes boat trip. Evening talks will focus on the local natural environment.

The camp base will be The Laurels Function Centre at Sale's Greenwattle Racecourse. Participants will be asked to arrange their own accommodation for the three nights. Information about Sale's many accommodation options will be provided with the First Circular due in October.

Observations

Plants in flower recorded by Richard Piesse

1. FOBIF walk in the Heritage Park south of Vaughan, July 17:

Acacia aspera; gunnii; lanigera; pycnantha.

Pterostylis sp. affin. *parviflora, P. smaragyna.*

Grevillia alpina, Epacris impressa, Eucalyptus melliodora.

2. Kalimna Park July 21:

Bursaria spinosa, Daviesia ulicifolia, Drosera aberrans, Hakea decurrens,

Philotheca verrucosa, Pterostylis smaragyna,

Acacia aspera; genistifolia; pycnantha; baileyana.

Reported at the July meeting:

- A Chough nest was passed around
- Ron observed a **Rose Robin** near the creek in the Botanical Gardens over two days
- A large flock of Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos was seen along Colles road.
- A pair of Flame Robins at Moonlight Flat today – Peter Turner
- Geraldine – a Mistletoe bird flew into the window at Barkers Ck.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists
Coming events

Fri Aug 12 meeting: ALAN REID – Regional Model for monitoring Flora & Fauna (using Flinders as an example)

Sat Aug 13 field trip: Swift Parrot Survey – 9am start

Sat August 20 Roadside Cleanup - 9am start at cnr. Golf Links rd. on Pyrenees Highway

Takes 1 – 2 hrs., Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Garbage bags and reflective vests will be supplied. Please note KABC rules prohibit anyone under 16 from working on the roadside.

Fri Sept. 9 meeting: PETER MULLER – Ant biology

Sat Sept. 10 field trip: leader Peter Muller

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Chris Timewell) - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Subscriptions for 2016
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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